



ISLAMIC ART NOW
Contemporary Art
of the Middle East

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Arash Hanaei
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Linda Komaroff

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

ISLAMIC ART NOW



Kodak 160NC-2 3111



In recent years, the parameters of Islamic art have expanded to include contemporary works by artists from, or with roots in, the Middle East. This art often has an up-to-the-minute sensibility in terms of its medium (such as neon or digitally constructed images) or its political messaging, but what we have here termed “*Islamic Art Now*” shares the same DNA with historical Islamic art: the use of writing in the Arabic alphabet as both a means of communication and decoration, brilliant color, and superb balance between design and form. These works of art provide a contemporary face to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s (LACMA’s) world-renowned Islamic art collection, demonstrating the deep connection between past and present, which is at the heart of an encyclopedic art museum. Of equal concern—and quite apart from our historical collection—is how they signal the virtuosity and creativity of artists from the Middle East (and diaspora communities) whose work is at once local and global.

LACMA has only recently begun to acquire such work within the context of its holdings of Islamic art, with the understanding that the ultimate success and relevance of this collection lies in building creative links between the past, present, and future. *Islamic Art Now* marks the first major installation of LACMA’s collection of contemporary art from the Middle East, which includes nearly two hundred works. Some of the artists presented here may be new to visitors, others are perhaps better known; what they share is not mere geography, nor is it even a common faith (as Muslims, Christians, and Jews are represented), but a demonstrable fluency in the visual language of the Middle East and its associated cultural traditions.

The entries that follow are sequenced to reflect the order in which the works appeared in the exhibition galleries.

مقدمه در

فہرست مختصر

نیروں کا نظر

بیت سراہ

راکرام میدایم

بر مفتون گوت

Arash Hanaei

In this three-part piece, Arash Hanaei takes on the messaging of the garishly colored neon signage that marks the cityscape of Tehran, his home. Each section of the work repeats the colloquial Persian expression *too khali*, which means empty or void. It is a conscious reference and homage to the work of Parviz Tanavoli, one of Iran's greatest modern sculptors, who is best known for his imaginative three-dimensional renderings of the Persian word *heech*, or nothingness. Tanavoli not only helped to define the artistic generation leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution but has continued to inspire postrevolutionary artists like Hanaei.

Arash Hanaei has participated in solo and group shows since 2002, when he received a BA in photography from Azad University of Art, Tehran. Included in the groundbreaking 2009 exhibition *Iran Inside Out* at New York's Chelsea Museum, his work has also been shown at Art Dubai and at exhibitions in Paris and Rome. He currently divides his time between Tehran and Paris.

◆ Arash Hanaei
Iran, b. 1978
Too Khali (Void), 2011
Inkjet prints; neon
Prints: 43 1/4 × 43 1/4 in. (109.9 × 109.9 cm),
43 1/4 × 43 1/2 in. (109.9 × 110.5 cm); neon:
20 × 43 3/4 × 1 1/2 in. (50.8 × 111.1 × 3.8 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2013.161.1–3

Opposite and following pages: details
of *Too Khali (Void)*





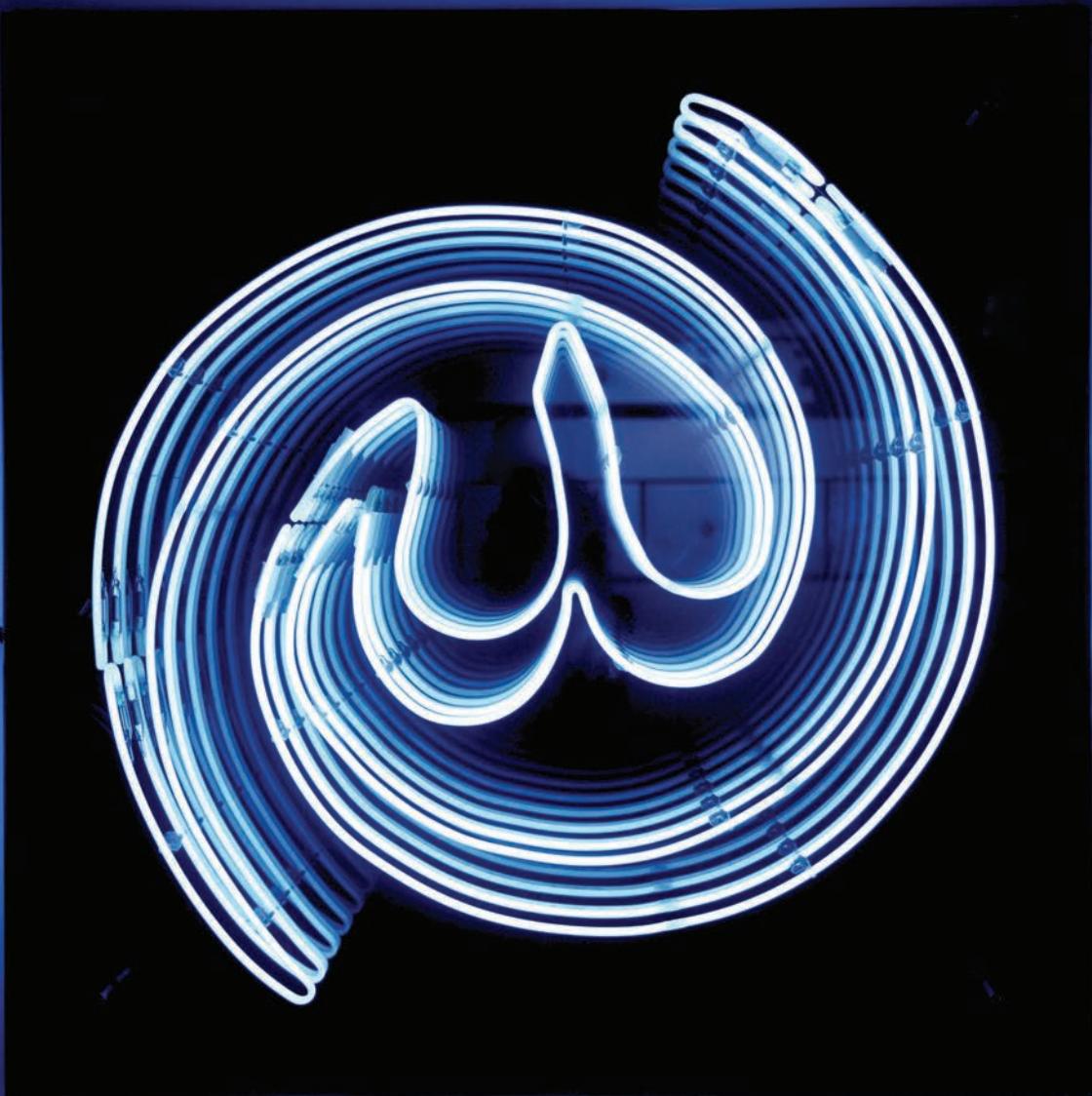


Nasser Al Salem

In the Islamic world, calligraphy has always been considered the noblest form of art because of its association with the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, which is written in Arabic. Trained as both a calligrapher and an architect, Nasser Al Salem has developed a unique approach to writing. He focuses on the words and their meaning, medium, and aesthetic, resulting in multivalent, highly nuanced, and engaging works. In *God Is Alive, He Shall Not Die (blue)*, Al Salem employs neon to amplify the word "Allah," which, through the use of mirrors, creates an optical illusion that provides visual substantiation to the believer in God's infinite nature.

Nasser Al Salem has exhibited with the arts initiative Edge of Arabia in Istanbul, Turkey, and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; was included in the British Museum's *Hajj* exhibition (2012); and was short-listed for the 2013 Jameel Prize. While his work is strongly influenced by Islamic faith and tradition, he often employs nontraditional media such as neon, video, and even sand for his calligraphy, in addition to the more customary ink on paper.

- ◆ Nasser Al Salem
Saudi Arabia, b. 1984
God Is Alive, He Shall Not Die (blue), 2012
Neon in infinity box
47 1/4 × 47 1/4 in. (120 × 120 cm)
Purchased with funds provided
by the Al-Ammar Family
M.2014.181



Lalla Essaydi

Reclining Odalisque takes its subject matter and title from nineteenth-century European Orientalist paintings, which portrayed a fantasized Western notion of a harem slave (or odalisque), shown nude or partially clad and presented for the male gaze. The scale of this photograph lends it some of the same presence and power as many of the celebrated paintings of this theme, but here the recumbent figure is covered in and surrounded by words, provoking in a different manner, perhaps challenging viewers to see her for who she really is.

Lalla Essaydi's art frequently depicts the reclining female form in order to address issues of identity from her own unique perspective as an artist, a woman, an Arab, a Muslim, and a Moroccan. As such, she often inscribes her images in henna (as in this work), usually with her own words. Born and raised in Morocco, Essaydi received her formal training in France and the United States, where she now resides. Her work is well known from numerous international exhibitions and is represented in major museum collections in North America and Europe.

◆ Lalla Essaydi
Morocco, b. 1956, active United States
Reclining Odalisque, 2008
From the series *Les femmes du Maroc*
Three chromogenic prints mounted
to aluminum and protected with Mactac
luster laminate
59 ½ × 48 in. (151.1 × 121.9 cm) each;
59 ½ × 144 in. (151.1 × 365.8 cm) overall
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2012.19a–c

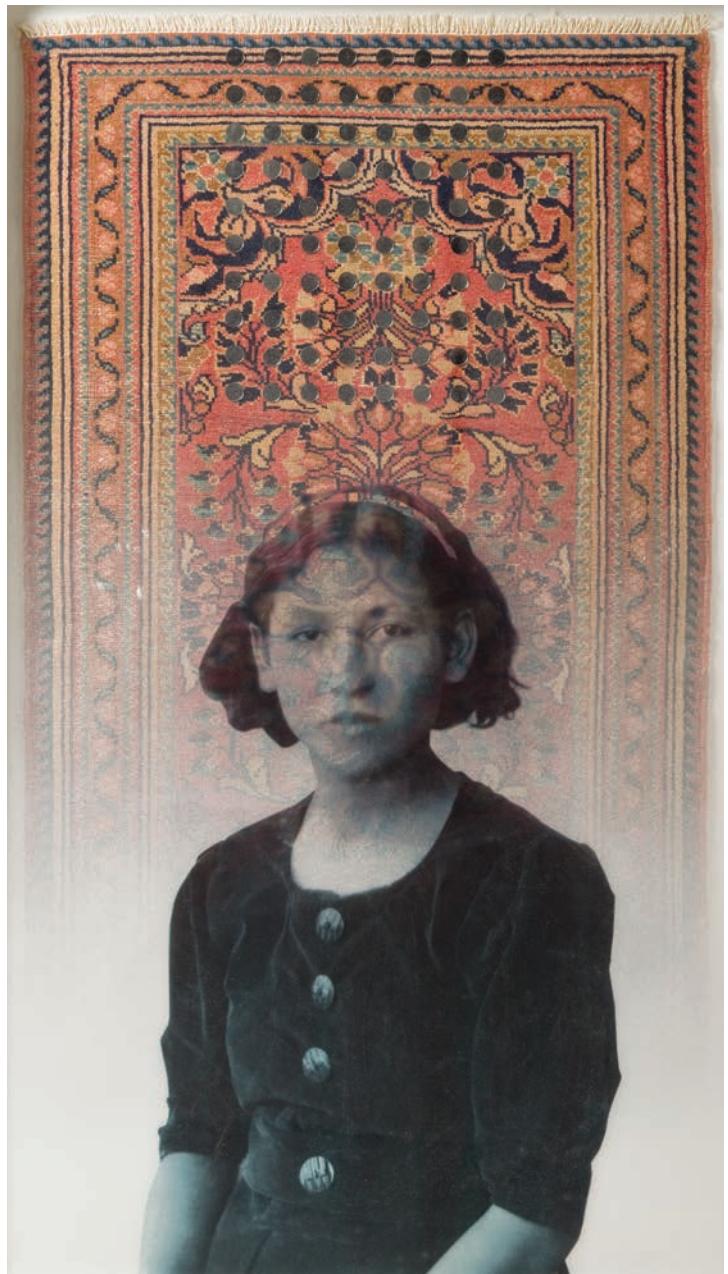
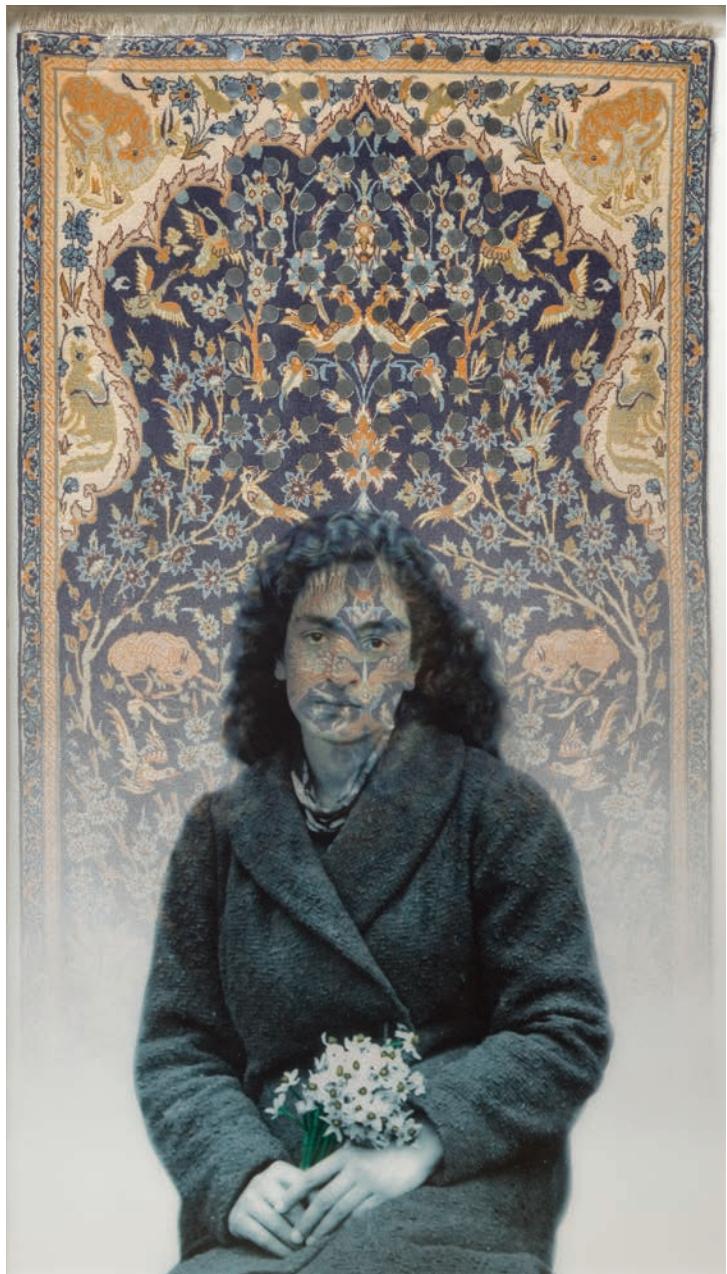


Samira Alikhanzadeh

Under the leadership of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41), Iran was transformed into a modern nation-state. As part of his reform movement, Reza Shah sought the elimination of the Islamic veil, and in 1936 a law was enacted that decreed the compulsory *uncovering* of women. These twin works focus on two found images from this period; they capture the first generation of Iranian women who were free to appear without hijab in public and in photographs. The compositions incorporate contemporaneous Persian carpets, which help to fix these young women in time and place, as well as small shards of mirror that allow the viewer reflected in the cut glass to identify more closely with the nameless girls dressed in their once-fashionable clothes.

Samira Alikhanzadeh often references the past as a means of exploring life in present-day Iran, but she generally looks back only as far as the first half of the twentieth century. Old found family photographs and mirrors are common elements in her work. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and especially Tehran, where she lives and works.

- ◆ Samira Alikhanzadeh
Iran, b. 1967
Untitled, 2009, carpet from first half
of 20th century
Untitled, 2009, carpet from first half
of 20th century
Persian wool carpets with mirror
shards under plexiglass, photos printed
on plexiglass
57 ¼ × 33 ¾ × 1 ⅛ in. (145.4 × 85.4 ×
4.8 cm); 57 ¼ × 33 ¾ × 1 ⅛ in. (145.4 ×
86 × 4.8 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by
Anousheh and Ali Razi, and Mrs.
Charlene S. Kornblum and Dr. S. Sanford
Kornblum through the 2010 Collectors
Committee
M.2010.45.1, .2



Manal Al Dowayan

Culled from a newspaper clipping, this disassembled image depicts fully veiled women, clothed in the traditional black abaya, engaged in study. Each section of the photograph is inscribed with an archaic Arabic word, all synonyms for “courage” and appropriated from a tenth-century text by Abu Mansour Al-Tha’alby Al-Naysabouri. Rendered in black plexiglass, the three-dimensional, anachronistic words create a tension and contradiction between these stereotypical representations of today’s Saudi women and their underlying humanity.

Manal Al Dowayan is one of the best known among the new generation of Saudi artists; she works mainly in the medium of photography. Her series *The State of Disappearance*, to which the print *Courage* belongs, is the artist’s personal investigation into the portrayal of Saudi women in print media, especially newspapers. The series is a commentary on the seeming invisibility of a large sector of Saudi women, who are customarily shrouded in black when in public.

◆ Manal Al Dowayan
Saudi Arabia, b. 1973
Courage, 2013
From the series *The State
of Disappearance*
Digital print mounted on dibond
with plexiglass lettering
28 ¼ × 3 ¼ × ¾ in. (71.8 × 8.3 × 1.9 cm)
each; 28 ¼ × 51 ¾ × ¾ in. (71.8 × 130 ×
1.9 cm) overall
Purchased with funds provided
by an anonymous donor
M.2013.105a–n



Youssef Nabil

This striking image of Natacha Atlas, known for her fusion of Arabic, North African, and Western electronic music (particularly hip-hop), was inspired by the glamorous celebrity photographs common in mid-twentieth-century Cairo. It is one of several portraits Youssef Nabil made of the pop singer in which he creates an anachronistic effect by hand painting the black-and-white photograph. Atlas is depicted here as a belly dancer, in a strong and sexually unabashed manner. Supine, sensuous, and headless, she is unaware of the viewer's gaze. The notion of the "gaze," which activates a Western Orientalist fiction of the Middle East, is perhaps what this image is all about. It also reflects the artist's fascination with Egyptian films of the 1950s to 70s.

Born in Cairo in 1972, Youssef Nabil began his career as a photographer in 1992 by re-creating famous scenes from the Egyptian cinema with his friends. Since then his solo work has entered numerous museum collections, including those of the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. He has exhibited in the United States, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East as well.

◆ Youssef Nabil
Egypt, b. 1972, active United States
Natacha Atlas, Cairo, 2000, 2000
Hand-colored gelatin silver print
29½ × 45 in. (75 × 115 cm)
Purchased with funds provided
by Walid and Susie Wahab
M.2014.178



Abdullah Al Saab

Situated on the Persian Gulf and sharing borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait is one of the richest countries in the world. This pair of photographs comes from the series *Boundaries*, which depicts life in Kuwait for the affluent and educated twentysomething generation caught between sophisticated technology and unbridled consumerism, and religious tradition and social conservatism. Working with the photographer Djinane Alsuwayeh, Abdullah Al Saab carefully staged and constructed each image in the series. Some are intentionally tongue-in-cheek, as in *Technology Killed Reality*, and others express his own personal frustrations.

Trained in interior design, Abdullah Al Saab began creating clothes in 2008. He has recently turned to conceptual design and photography, as reflected in the series *Boundaries*, where he incorporates his own line of clothes and explores his interest in merging art and fashion.

- ◆ Abdullah Al Saab
Kuwait, b. 1986
Ayb (Shame), 2013
Technology Killed Reality, 2013
From the series *Boundaries*
Inkjet prints
19 ¾ × 27 ¾ in. (50.2 × 70.5 cm);
19 ¾ × 27 ½ in. (50.2 × 70.2 cm)
Gift of Tamara Keleshian
M.2013.184.1, .2



Susan Hefuna

At first glance, *Woman Behind Mashrabiya I* conjures the seemingly distant world of Old Cairo as captured in vintage photographs and Orientalist paintings. There the *mashrabiya*, or wooden window screen, not only circulated fresh air and filtered sunlight but also acted as a kind of architectural veil. Behind the *mashrabiya*, women could see without being seen, safe from prying eyes and whatever else might lay outside their windows. Here, largely obscured by the deeply cast shadows of the intricately carved window screen we see, barely, a woman in full hijab. The tensely structured tectonics of light and shadow give this photograph its strength but it is the image's beguiling ambiguity and our own complex reactions to it that make it an exceptional work of art.

Born to Egyptian and German parents, Susan Hefuna spent part of her childhood in a small village in the Nile Delta. She went on to study painting and then photography in Germany. Her body of work—which has been exhibited widely in Europe, North America, Africa, and the Middle East—includes photography as well as sculpture, drawing, and video.

- ◆ Susan Hefuna
Germany, b. 1962, active Egypt
Woman Behind Mashrabiya I, 1997
Face-mounted laser chromogenic print
on Kodak Premium paper
78 ¾ × 55 ½ in. (200 × 140 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Ann
Colgin and Joe Wender, Kelvin Davis,
John and Carolyn Diemer, Andy Gordon
and Carlo Brandon, Deborah McLeod,
and David and Mary Solomon through
the 2013 Collectors Committee
M.2013.125



Hassan Hajjaj

Inspired by the “henna girls” of Marrakesh, *Gang of Kesh* (from the series *Kesh Angels*) features subjects dressed in an alternate reality of haute couture. They wear the traditional *djellaba*, head scarf, and veil, but the garments are made entirely of modern fabrics with bold prints such as bright polka dots, camouflage designs, or leopard spots. The young women are shown with their motorbikes, seemingly playing against Western stereotypes of hijab attire and especially the veil as an instrument of disempowerment. These “biker chicks” are clearly in full command of the powerful vehicles they ride.

Caravane is a portrait of Helen Parker-Jayne Isibor, also known as the Venus Bushfires, a Nigerian singer-songwriter. She wears a bright red robe adorned with the Coca-Cola logo and a colorful headscarf wrapped around a frame to project outward like giant ears, all the while flashing the victory symbol with her left hand; in her right hand is her Swiss-made, UFO-shaped instrument called the *hang*.

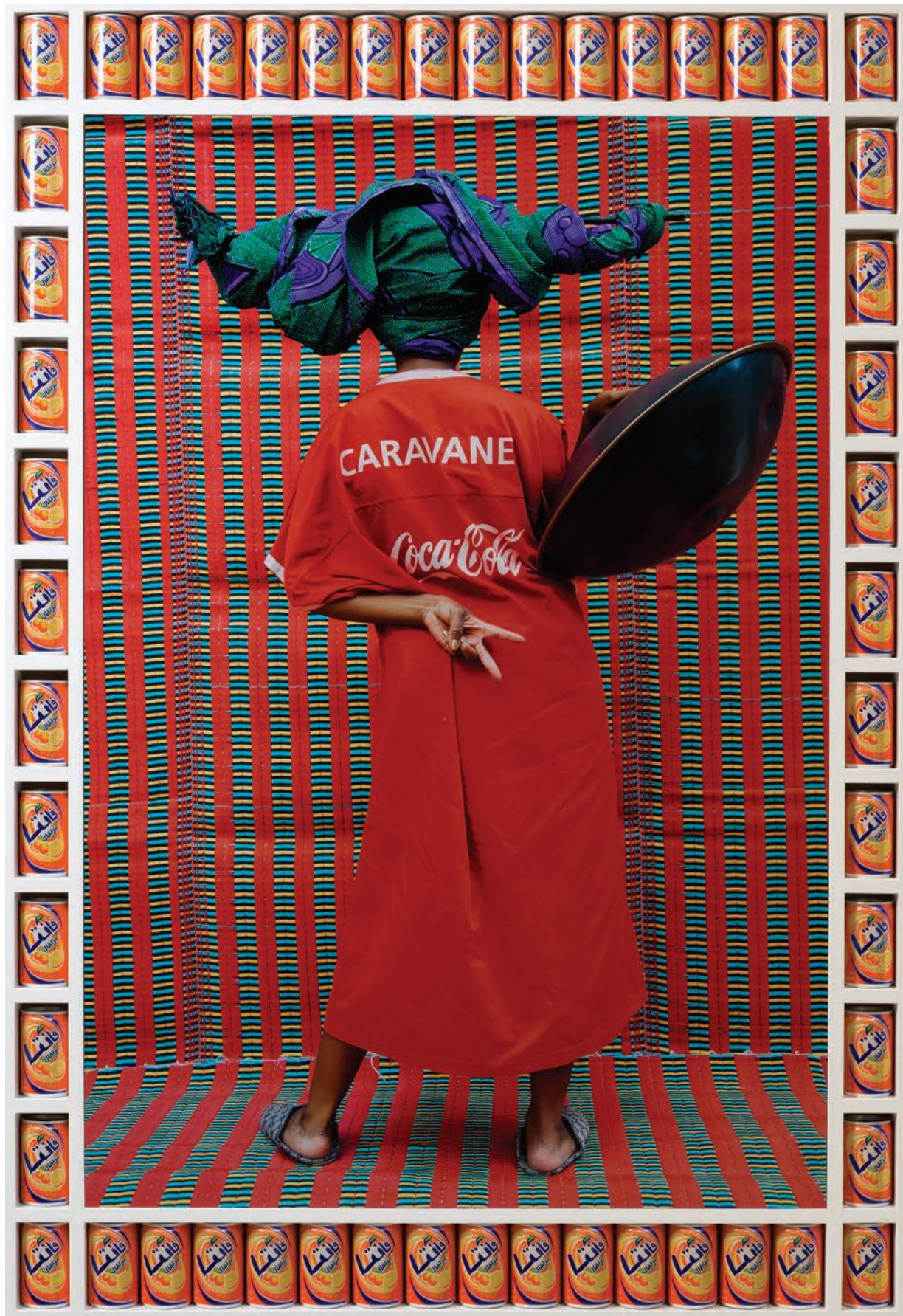
Hassan Hajjaj was born in Larache, a small harbor town in northern Morocco. He moved to London as a teenager, and now divides his time between that city and Marrakesh. Best known as a photographer, Hajjaj depicts a globalized society where the margins of cultural identity—whether African, Arab, or European—are continuously shifting and blurred. Here, as in many of his photographs, Hajjaj creates frames incorporating Coke or Fanta cans or various other packaged goods often labelled in Arabic.

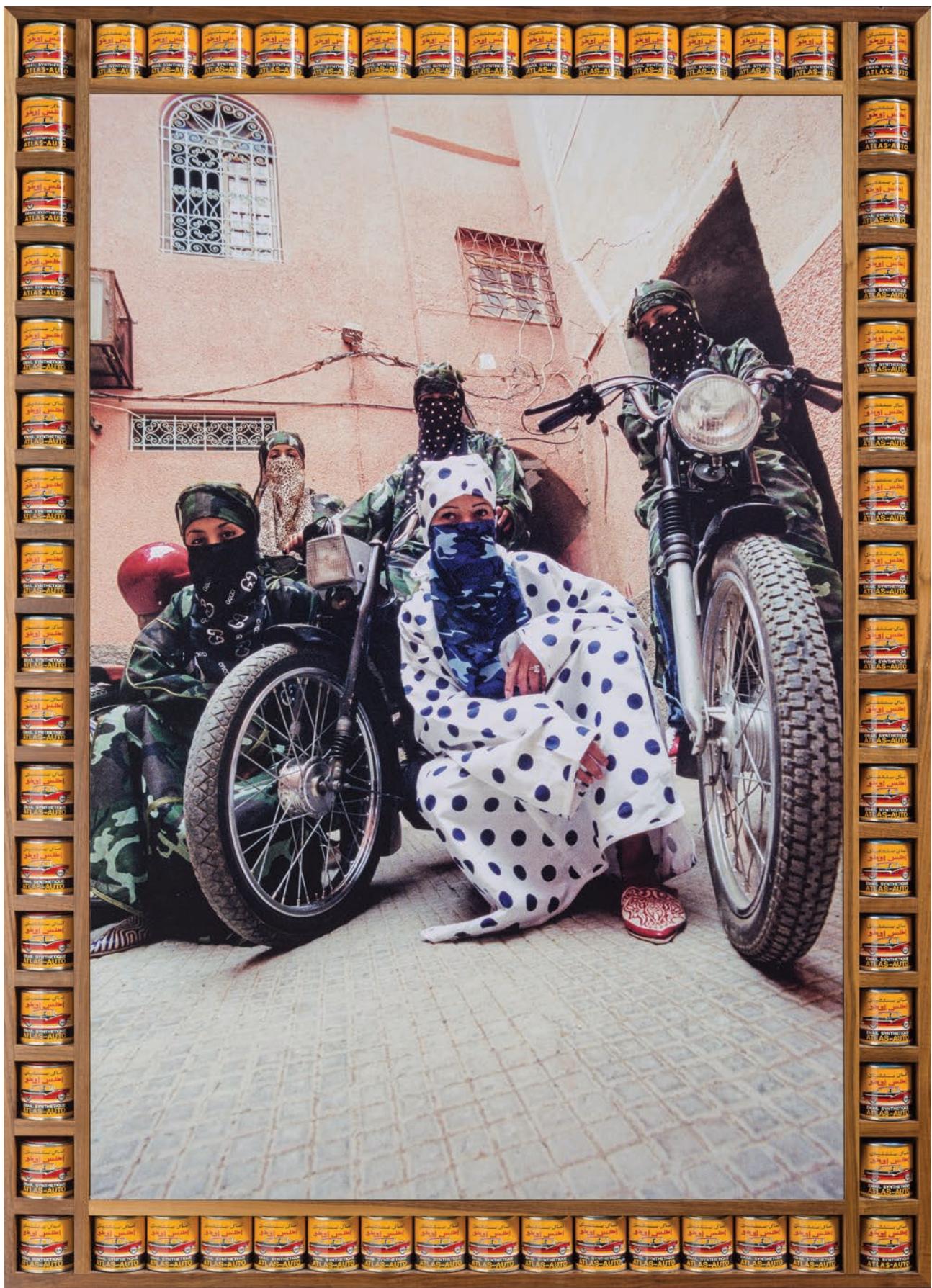
◆ Hassan Hajjaj
Morocco, b. 1961, active England
Caravane, 2011
Chromogenic print with wood frame
and found tins
53 $\frac{9}{16}$ × 36 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (136 × 93 cm) framed
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2014.162

Gang of Kesh Part 2, 2000
Chromogenic print with wood frame
and car-paint tins
37 × 51 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (94 × 129.8 cm) framed
Gift of the artist
M.2014.176

Opposite: detail of *Caravane*; following
pages: full views of *Caravane* and *Gang
of Kesh Part 2*







Tal Shochat

In this photograph a partially nude woman covers her breasts with lemons while brazenly posing in front of an Ottoman fountain and colorful tilework. The composition evokes nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings in which the imagined exoticism or “otherness” of the Middle East reflected a Western fantasy of the East, especially its women. The scene recalls a favorite Orientalist theme of ladies of the harem bathing, but the actual setting appears to be the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem.

Tal Shochat, currently based in Tel Aviv, has exhibited widely in Israel, Europe, and the United States, including the Victoria and Albert Museum’s *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* (2012). She is better known for her photographs of trees, an example of which is also included on page 45, than for her figural work.

◆ Tal Shochat
Israel, b. 1974
Rumia, 2012
Chromogenic print
51 × 39 ½ in. (129.5 × 100.3 cm)
Gift of Shulamit Nazarian in memory
of her grandmothers, Golbahar Hakhami
Nazarian and Heshmat Shaouli Nassi,
and in honor of her mother, Soraya Sarah
Nazarian
M.2014.177a–b



کار و میوه های میانه ای دارند که در آنها فروخته شده اند. اینها را می خواهند که باز بخواهند و باز بخواهند. اینها را می خواهند که باز بخواهند و باز بخواهند. اینها را می خواهند که باز بخواهند و باز بخواهند.

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Abbas Kowsari

Iran's first group of female cadets graduated from the Tehran Police Academy in 2003, after three years of intensive training. These two striking photographs were captured at a 2005 graduation ceremony. As part of their rite of passage, the all-female police units practiced martial arts, brandished their weapons, performed chase routines, and scaled walls. In keeping with the staged nature of the police pageantry, each scene is carefully framed like a still image from an action film or television show, adding to their ironic and subtle commentary on contemporary Iranian society.

Abbas Kowsari has worked as a photojournalist and photo editor for a number of leading Iranian newspapers. His press credentials have often provided him with rare opportunities as a fine art photographer. A documentarian of everyday life in Iran, he captures imagery not commonly seen in Western media. His work has been exhibited in Paris, New York, Damascus, and Tehran.

◆ Abbas Kowsari
Iran, b. 1970
Untitled, 2006
Untitled, 2006
From the series Police Women Academy
Chromogenic prints
27 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 39 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (70 × 100 cm);
39 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 27 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (100 × 70 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2015.1.1, .2

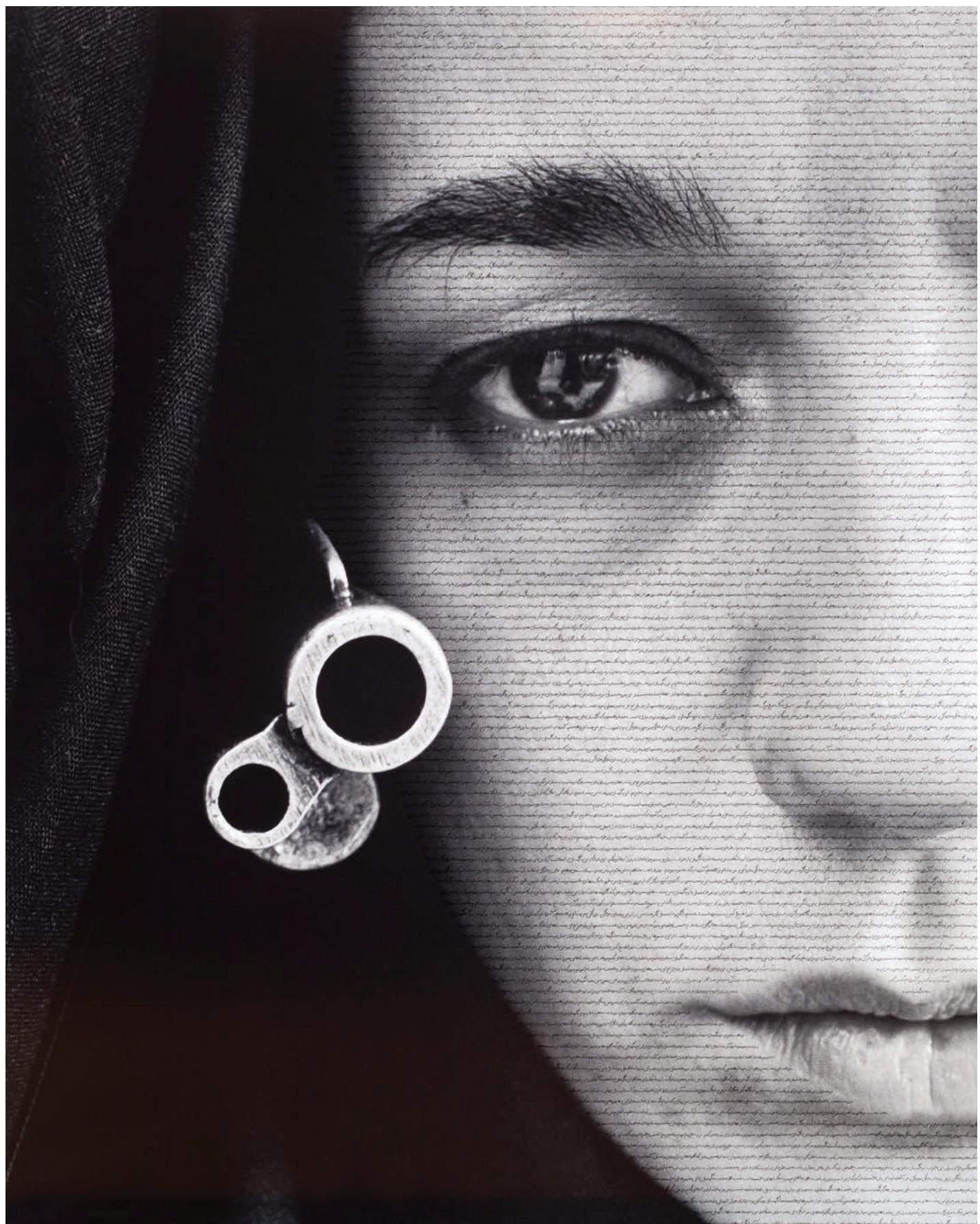


Shirin Neshat

This photograph is among the most powerful and appealing images from Shirin Neshat's monumental series *Women of Allah*, which portrays chador-clad Iranian women, often posed with a rifle or gun in a provocative manner, whose exposed body parts are inscribed with text in black ink. The images contradict a Western notion of Muslim women as diminished and desexualized by the veil and disempowered by their faith. In Neshat's work, women are strong, even heroic, eroticized by their weapons and sanctioned by the texts inscribed on their bodies. Here, the print shows a side of a woman's face, the barrel of a gun emerging from the shadowy area between her cheek and barely visible chador like a gaudy earring. She stares outward calmly, her face covered with verses by the Iranian poet Tahereh Saffarzadeh, in which she addresses her brothers in the revolution, asking if she can participate.

Now based in New York, Shirin Neshat is perhaps the best known artist of the Iranian diaspora that followed the 1979 Islamic Revolution. She had left in 1974 to study in the United States but returned to Iran in 1990, and much of what she saw and experienced then informed her first major body of work, *Women of Allah*.

◆ Shirin Neshat
Iran, b. 1957, active United States
Speechless, 1996
From the series *Women of Allah*
Gelatin silver print and ink
66 × 52 ½ in. (167.6 × 133.4 cm)
Purchased with funds provided
by Jamie McCourt through the
2012 Collectors Committee
M.2012.60



Sadik Alfraji

In spite of its Baghdad setting and intimately personal narrative, this highly emotional work reflects a universal experience: the setting aside of childhood and the relinquishment of parental security, in this case precipitated by the death of the artist's father. *The House That My Father Built* re-creates a child's memories, perceptions, comforts, and anxieties through animation and memorabilia (pictures of the artist's parents and his father's clothes hanging on a wall).

A native of Baghdad, Sadik Alfraji immigrated to the Netherlands in the early 1990s. He describes his work, primarily multimedia installations, as "dealing with the problem of existence," perhaps in part as a way of addressing his own displacement from Iraq. Over and over again in his work he confronts the viewer with a solitary, large-eyed figure depicted in profile, footless and floating in space. It is this strange figure, supersized into a giant, who is featured as the quietly sad observer in *The House That My Father Built*. This work was initially commissioned for the 2010 exhibition *Told, Untold, Retold*, presented in conjunction with the opening of the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar.

◆ Sadik Alfraji
Iraq, b. 1960, active the Netherlands
The House That My Father Built, 2010
India ink, rice paper, oil on canvas,
chromogenic prints, and Blu-ray disk
Installation: 153 1/8 × 196 7/8 in.
(389 × 500 cm) overall; video: 6:12 min.
Anonymous gift
M.2014.34.1–7

Opposite: details of *The House That My Father Built*



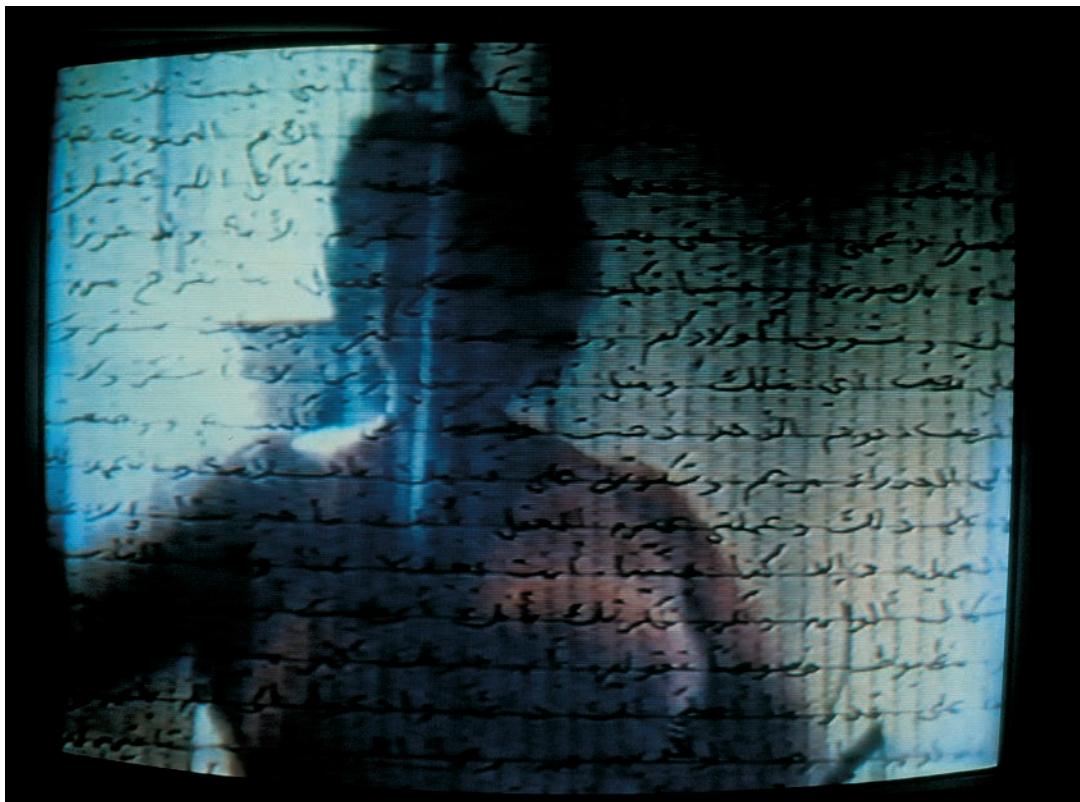
Mona Hatoum

Measures of Distance is a highly personal work that focuses on images of the artist's mother in the shower, covered only by the Arabic text of her letters to her daughter. The mother's lovingly photographed nude body clearly bears the signs of having birthed and nurtured children. Her letters, read aloud, gradually reveal the circumstances that have separated the mother living in Beirut from the daughter living in London. The artist has said this work "spoke of the complexities of exile, displacement, the sense of loss and separation caused by war. In other words, it contextualized the image, or this person, 'my mother,' within a social-political context." It is also an intensely emotional, intimate, and physically palpable portrait of a mother-daughter relationship filled with longing but undiminished by distance.

Born to Palestinian parents in Beirut, Mona Hatoum's work is known internationally. She was brought up in Lebanon but has lived most of her life in England, and notions of exile and displacement are integral to her art. This video was one of her first major pieces but her most iconic work—*Prayer Mat*—is also a part of LACMA's collection and is included on page 57.

◆ Mona Hatoum
Lebanon, b. 1952, active England
Measures of Distance, 1988
Single-channel video; 15:30 min.
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2013.28.1–2

Opposite: details of *Measures of Distance*



Naghmeh Ghassemloou

This photograph documents the effects of urban development on Navab, an old neighborhood in the southwest of the central section of the megalopolis known as Tehran. The partially gutted and exposed ruin of a building is imaginatively brought back to life through the digital addition of ghost-like images on the stairway and in the shower. It is one of a series of views of demolished structures in Navab, the result of a failed municipal renovation project, that convey in a highly original manner the sense of loss, isolation, and nostalgia that inhabits much of contemporary Iranian art.

Naghmeh Ghassemloou has shown her photographs extensively in Iran, where she is well represented in private collections, but was largely unknown outside the country until recently. Her work, which often subtly evokes a society in decline, is invariably marked by a superb sense of composition and a perfect balance of color and form that tempers some of the melancholy mood of her photographs.

- ◆ Naghmeh Ghassemloou
- Iran, b. 1963
- Untitled*, 2003
- From the series Navab
- Inkjet print and photocollage
- 35 ¼ × 51 ¾ in. (87 × 131.5 cm)
- Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
- M.2013.162.3



Amir Mousavi

This print belongs to the series Lost in Wonderland, which records some of the street art of Tehran: murals painted on buildings and sponsored by the municipality in an attempt to enliven and revitalize certain neighborhoods. The images are meticulously constructed; note how the painted white bird is framed to appear as if it sits in the real tree branch. The re-created images are converted back into a new form of painting that plays with light and shadow as the everyday life of the city and its inhabitants interacts with the murals, at times making it difficult to distinguish between the original painted surface and reality.

Amir Mousavi first trained as a painter then gravitated to photography. He has exhibited extensively in Iran and more recently in the United States. He has said of his Lost in Wonderland series, “From the beginning I loved surfaces, and the flattest of surfaces were walls, which for me have a life of their own.”

◆ Amir Mousavi
Iran, b. 1975
Untitled #8, 2011
From the series Lost in Wonderland I
Dye coupler print
32 ¼ × 48 ¼ in. (81.9 × 122.6 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2012.94.1

Opposite and following pages: detail
and full view of *Untitled #8*







Tal Shochat

Shaked (Almond) belongs to a series of portrait-like photographs, each one focusing on a singular specimen of a different variety of fruit tree. As in this work, fecund trees are shot at night against a black background and illuminated with artificial light, giving the plant an almost unearthly quality of perfection. Trees, such as the Tree of Life, have a long history in the literature and visual imagery of the Middle East. In more recent times, the tree, or the act of planting a tree, has come to be associated with the modern state of Israel. Shochat's photographs are often carefully staged moments in time that focus on ephemera that will disappear or resume their former natures once the artificial lights are extinguished.

◆ Tal Shochat
Israel, b. 1974
Shaked (Almond), 2011
Chromogenic print
41 × 38 in. (104.1 × 96.5 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
and the Ralph M. Parsons Fund
M.2014.175



Ahmad Aali

This striking image was made in 1978 in Tehran at the beginning of the Iranian revolution. It captures graffiti on a corrugated metal door of the type that began to appear throughout the city. The message here—“Down with Communism”—subsequently effaced by those with a contrary point of view, is framed in the manner of an abstract painting. It eerily presages the full-blown revolution and its immediate aftermath: the dripping red paint blotting out the political slogan evokes the violence that followed in its wake.

Best known as a photographer, Ahmad Aali has been an active force in the Iranian art world since the early 1960s. His subject matter is most often Iran itself—its landscape, architecture, and people—framed against the tumultuous political, economic, and social changes that have taken place over the last fifty years. Though he covers some of the same territory, Aali is not a photo-journalist; rather his main interest, as in this work, is composition.

◆ Ahmad Aali
Iran, b. 1935
Untitled (“Down with Communism”), 1978,
printed 2014
From the series Walls of Tehran
Inkjet print
28 ¾ × 39 ¾ in. (72 × 100 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2015.2





Farideh Lashai

This pair of videos is composed of short clips carefully selected from dozens of Iranian films produced mainly in the two decades preceding the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The films belong to a popular genre of cabaret cinema that captures in black-and-white the teeming nightlife of southern Tehran while relying upon universal filmic story lines and characters, such as the innocent girl from the country who comes to the big city to become a dancer. Projected onto opposing walls, on one of which hangs a canvas painted to resemble a theatrical curtain, the videos re-create a nightclub setting in which the viewer, seated in the middle, becomes part of the cabaret.

Trained in Vienna at the Academy of Decorative Arts, Farideh Lashai was a multidimensional artist who worked in painting, sculpture, and video, some of which incorporate her own paintings and animation. She was also a published poet and novelist and is known for translating Bertolt Brecht's work into Persian. Indeed, literary themes and storytelling are an integral part of her last works, including this one.

◆ Farideh Lashai
Iran, 1944–2013
Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow, 2012
Oil, acrylic, and pencil on canvas,
two-channel video projection
Work on canvas: 82 11/16 × 62 9/16 in.
(210 × 158 cm); video: 17 min. loop
Purchased with funds provided by
Hormoz and Fariba Ameri, Navabeh
Borman, JoAnn Busutil, Homeira
Goldstein, Anousheh and Ali Razi, and
Shidan, Mehran, and Laila Taslimi
M.2014.132.1–2

Opposite: detail of *Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow*



Mitra Tabrizian

The monumental *Tehran 2006* is a metaphorical study of isolation, displacement, and social upheaval. Inspired in part by contemporary Iranian cinema, it casts ordinary people as themselves but directed in their placement, attitude, and movement. The scene was photographed to look like a wide-angle shot in a film, which resulted in a panoramic view that was achieved through digital “stitching.” Shot in a residential area on the outskirts of Tehran, the setting suggests a society without a functioning infrastructure: there are no streetlights or, for that matter, streets. Even the omnipresent billboard with its iconic images of Iran’s revolutionary leadership seems incapable of imposing order or direction; its text suggests an intentional irony: “We will continue [on] the path of the imam and martyrs of the revolution.”

Born in Tehran, Mitra Tabrizian lives and works in London. She has exhibited and published widely in major international museums, including her 2008 solo exhibition at the Tate Britain. Her subject matter is both Western and Iranian and addresses a broad range of topics, especially social displacement and alienation, through disturbing (and often staged) photographic tableaux.

◆ Mitra Tabrizian
Iran, b. 1959, active England
Tehran 2006, 2006
Lightjet chromogenic print
39 ¾ × 118 ½ in. (101 × 302 cm)
Gift of the Buddy Taub Foundation, Jill
and Dennis A. Roach, Directors, through
the 2014 Collectors Committee
M.2014.67

Opposite and following pages: detail
and full view of *Tehran 2006*







Barbad Golshiri

The key to this piece is revealed through its Persian text. Rendered in a font and format often used in a traditional newspaper death notice, it commemorates a political dissident who was denied an actual tombstone. The work was intended to function as a stencil; its Kafkaesque text, when activated by charcoal powder, temporarily acknowledges one man's sacrifice. The epitaph reads: "Here Mim Kaf Alif [literally, his initials, M. K. A.] does not rest. He is dead. Layer beneath layer dead. Depth beyond depth. Each time deeper. Each death deeper. Stone upon stone. Each stone deeper. Each stone a death. Mim Kaf Mim Alif has no stone. Has never had. No trace of it (also to be understood as: so be it). Never in all deaths. December came and Mim Kaf Mim Alif was no longer [there]. Is not."

Based in Tehran, Barbad Golshiri belongs to a new generation of artists whose work responds directly to the constraints imposed by the politics and ideology of the Iranian government. *The Untitled Tomb* was a focal point of Golshiri's second one-man show in New York, at Thomas Erben Gallery in 2013, presented as a kind of sculptural cemetery memorializing martyrs to Iran's ruling regime.

◆ Barbad Golshiri
Iran, b. 1982
The Untitled Tomb, 2012
Iron
53 1/8 × 23 13/16 × 2 1/2 in.
(135 × 60.5 × 6.4 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2014.27a–b

اینچا هیم کاف الـ
نیارامیده. هرده. لایه در
لایه هرده است. عــق تا
عــق. هر بار عــمیدقتـر. هر
هــرگ ســمیدقتـر. ســنگ بر
ســنگ. هر ســنگ عــمیدــقــتــر.
هر ســنگ هــرگــیــش.

هم کاف هیم الـ را
سـنگی نیـست. هـیـچ
سـنگـیـش نـبـودـه اـسـت.
نـیـسـت کـه نـیـسـت. در
هـیـچ هـرـگـیـش نـبـودـه. آـذـرـهـ
شـد و هـیـم کـاف هـیـم
الـف نـبـودـه. نـیـسـت.

Mona Hatoum

As part of their daily prayer rituals, while facing toward Mecca, Muslims perform a series of bowings and prostrations that include touching their heads to the ground. Mona Hatoum's dramatically unsettling *Prayer Mat*, with its rows of sharply pointed pins and embedded compass, projects a feeling of discomfort by subverting the object's intended use as a soft, clean surface on which the supplicant can kneel in the direction of the Kaaba, in Mecca, the spiritual home of all Muslims. This complex work transforms a symbol of comfort and spirituality into something torturous. Hatoum frequently plays with contradictions, such as hard and soft, pain and comfort, to suggest the menacing within the mundane. She often seeks to agitate and challenge viewers with her work. Her imaginative and fearless use of substances such as pins, human hair, and glass marbles has helped to expand the formal and material qualities of artistic expression for a new generation.

◆ Mona Hatoum
Lebanon, b. 1952, active England
Prayer Mat, 1995
Nickel-plated brass pins, compass,
canvas, and glue
26 $\frac{7}{16}$ × 44 $\frac{1}{8}$ × $\frac{5}{8}$ in.
(67.2 × 112.1 × 1.5 cm)
Gift of the Peter Norton Family Foundation
AC1996.13.1



Wafaa Bilal

This picture of abject annihilation portrays the horror of war through an absence of human life and an eerie, dust-covered setting. Still more unsettling is the realization that the room with its throne-like chair is actually a doll-sized model magnified dramatically by the photograph. The scene is a handmade reconstruction of one of the many media images that document the destruction caused by the decade-long war in Iraq.

Wafaa Bilal, an associate arts professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1991. He is known internationally for his provocative performance pieces and interactive works. In the series *Ashes*, to which this photograph belongs, the ashes covering the models include human remains. The powerful photographs capture and reflect Bilal's own reactions to the war as an exiled Iraqi who experienced the devastation of his home not merely through media imagery but through the deaths of his father and brother.

◆ Wafaa Bilal
Iraq, b. 1966, active United States
Chair, 2003–13
From the series *Ashes*
Inkjet print
41 × 50 in. (104.1 × 127 cm)
Purchased with funds provided by Art
of the Middle East: CONTEMPORARY
M.2013.117



Published in conjunction with the installation
*Islamic Art Now: Contemporary Art of the
Middle East* at the Los Angeles County Museum
of Art, Los Angeles, California (January 31,
2015–February 14, 2016).

This publication was made possible in part
by Nooshin Malakzad with additional support
provided by Fariba and Hormoz Ameri.

Special thanks to Sandra Williams as well as
Jilana Stewart in LACMA's Art of the Middle East
department for their assistance throughout. We
are especially grateful to the Art of the Middle East:
CONTEMPORARY council members and the donors,
whose interest and generosity have enabled us to
build a significant collection in less than a decade,
a small part of which is reflected here.

Produced by LACMA Publications
Publisher: Lisa Gabrielle Mark
Managing Editor: Jennifer MacNair Stitt
Rights and Reproductions Assistant: Lauren Cronk
Art Director: Stuart Smith
Senior Graphic Designer: Katherine Go
Proofreader: Wendy K. Grady
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
5905 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90036
(323) 857-6000
www.lacma.org

ISBN 978-1-943042-00-5

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Cover: Susan Hefuna, *Woman Behind Mashrabiya I*
(detail), 1997, see also p. 23; title page: Lalla
Essaydi, *Reclining Odalisque* (detail), 2008, see
also p. 13; p. 5: Abbas Kowsari, *Untitled* (detail),
2006, from the series Police Women Academy,
see also p. 31

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